

Consumer and Community Participation Policy

Application	All parts of VAC including all Board members, employees, consultants, students, and volunteers
Exceptions	None
Legal and regulatory framework	Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Victoria)
Standards	QIC Standard 1: Building quality organisations QIC Standard 2: Providing quality services and programs QIC Standard 3: Sustaining quality external relationships
Contractual requirements	DHHS funding agreement
Associated policies	VAC Constitution Complaints, Compliments & Suggestions Policy
Associated procedures	Nil
Associated templates or forms	Nil

1. Preamble

Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) is a community led organisation that is driven by the engagement of our communities: All those living with and affected by HIV and the Sexually & Gender Diverse communities. VAC recognises through its constitution that the meaningful involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (MIPA) is vital to the realisation of effective HIV responses.

1.1 Purpose

VAC is committed to actively and meaningfully involving consumers and community members in decision making, service development, delivery and evaluation. VAC recognises that the perspective of the community is an essential and valuable resource for the organisation.

VAC's overall commitment to Consumer and Community Participation and our particular commitment to its practical application is articulated through this policy. In particular, this policy states our commitment to, and application of the principles for the meaningful involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (MIPA).

This policy aims to enhance engagement with the broader VAC community to increase their connectedness to, and support of, the work of VAC. It ensures consumers and community members are consulted and have the opportunity to have active and meaningful involvement in VAC planning and decision-making.

2. Scope

This policy applies across VAC and its activities

3. Definitions

MIPA - Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV (formerly GIPA - Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV) - GIPA aims to realise the rights and responsibilities of people living with HIV, including the right to self-determination and participation in decision-making processes that affect the lives of positive-people. The MIPA Principle has evolved from the notion that the personal experiences of people living with HIV should shape the HIV response

Community – a member of VAC's communities:

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- those at risk of, affected by or living with HIV
- members of the Sexually & Gender Diverse community

Consumers – people who are current or potential users of VAC services.

Sexually & Gender Diverse community – Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons

Participation – occurs when consumers, carers and community members are meaningfully involved in decision-making about policy and planning, care and treatment, and the wellbeing of themselves and the community. It is about having your say, thinking about why you believe in your views, and listening to the views and ideas of others. In working together, decisions may include a range of perspectives. Participation can be conceptualized as occurring across different levels from communication, consultation, partnership, delegation and control (1).

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Principles

The organisation's commitment to community participation is underpinned by the following principles:

Consumer & Community Participation Principles

- Consumers and community members may have different interests and priorities and may want to contribute and be involved in different ways within the organisation
- VAC uses participation to improve service quality and safety
- VAC believes participation improves outcomes
- Participation enables services to be more responsive to the needs and issues relevant to our communities and increases accountability to our communities
- VAC values diversity of input from the community in developing cohesive responses to community need
- VAC recognizes participation is an important ethical and democratic right
- VAC advocates participation as a source of empowerment for the community
- VAC recognizes participation improves sustainability
- Consumers and community representatives should be compensated for reasonable expenses related to community participation activities where practicable(2)

In addition,

Meaningful Involvement of PLHIV and Affected Communities (MIPA) Principles (3):

- We advocate for the meaningful involvement of PLHIV and affected communities in all aspects of the HIV response.
- We foster active and meaningful involvement of PLHIV and affected communities in all our activities.

4.2 Strategies

VAC will adhere to the International Code of Good Practice for NGOs Responding to HIV/AIDS (the. 'Code') and undertake self assessment against these principles (3).

VAC will adhere to the Victorian Government's, Doing-it-with-us-not-for-us strategy (1)

Procedures will be developed to ensure that these principles and strategies are applied in staff recruitment and in program development, monitoring and evaluation.

VAC will work with partner organisations and networks across the HIV, health and community sectors to increase the involvement of people living with HIV, recognising a thorough

understanding of the experiences of people living with HIV forms the basis of a sound HIV response.

VAC supports leadership development and opportunities for people living with HIV and encourages, peer-identified potential leaders. VAC supports their presence in advocacy, planning, implementation, delivery and review.

VAC supports the role of members of the sexually & gender diverse community as leaders and the importance of peers in the planning, implementation, delivery and review of services for the sexually & gender diverse community

VAC is committed to affirmative action for HIV positive people. This is an important part of VAC's recruitment and selection to staff positions. Under the affirmative action approach, obstacles to HIV positive people applying for positions at VAC will be as far as practicable removed. (4)

VAC seeks systematic feedback and input from community members to enhance our ability to understand and respond to community needs and improve services at individual, program and organisational levels.

VAC recognises the ladder or continuum of participation (1) and aims to increase opportunities across levels of participation through utilising opportunities across individual, program and organisational levels and across methods to support meaningful involvement. These will include:

- Participation of PLHIV and members of affected communities and sexually & gender diverse community at all levels of the organisation including Board of Directors, members, volunteers and staff.
- Convening of working groups, advisory and reference committees as relevant to program areas, campaigns and projects (Appendix 1).
- Use of community forums, focus groups, surveys and consultations

5. Implementation

Community participation is embedded across the organisation through the Community Participation Framework (Appendix 1).

Capacity building of VAC staff and volunteers and community members will occur to inform and support community participation and the meaningful involvement of those living with and affected by HIV.

5.1 Roles & Responsibilities

Ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with VAC's Community Participation Policy sits with the President at the Board level, and with the CEO at the operational level.

Directors, Managers, Team Leaders and supervisors have a responsibility to ensure their employees and volunteers whose work they supervise or monitor, are complying with this policy.

VAC employees and volunteers have a responsibility to comply with this policy.

5.2 Communication

All VAC employees, volunteers and members of the Board and community participation committees will be informed about VAC's Community Participation Policy.

VAC's Community Participation Policy will be uploaded to the VAC Intranet. VAC's Community Participation Policy will also be accessible via the VAC website for easy access by VAC's clients, volunteers, members and community, external stakeholders and interested parties.

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years after approval. The Director of Services will oversee the review process in partnership with consumers and community members including PLHIV and sexually & gender diverse community.

7. References

1. 2010 Victorian Government, Department of Health & Human Services, Doing-it-with-us-not-for-us:-Strategic-direction-2010-13
<http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Doing-it-with-us-not-for-us:-Strategic-direction-2010-13>
2. 2010 Inner South Community Health Community Participation Policy
3. 2007 "Renewing Our Voice" NGO Code of Good Practice for the of PLHIV and Affected Communities (MIPA)
4. 2013 Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) International Program Policy on the Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV (MIPA)
5. UNAIDS. 1999. "From Principle to Practice: Greater Involvement of People Living with or Affected by HIV/AIDS (GIPA)." UNAIDS Best Practice Collection. Geneva: UNAIDS
http://data.unaids.org/pub/BriefingNote/2007/jc1299_policy_brief_gipa.pdf

